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November 2007 Kislev 5768 To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA www.shma.com provide the gateways and, ultimately, the venues where the fulfillment of such needs occurs.

At the same time, the synagogue will need to foster identity and to craft meaning in novel terms that speak to the present generation. In his important works, Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow cites the creation of the highly informal and personalized opportunities for meaning and community that many Generation X and Y persons seek, and he points out how important aesthetics and culture are to the building of their community. Reform leadership and laity must incorporate these developments into their communal planning, as institutions can no longer depend upon traditional associational and kinship patterns to foster affiliation. Contemporary Jews move among movements and individual teachers as they engage in their own personal search for spiritual purpose and community. The Reform movement should embrace this development, and our teachers must have the courage and conviction to acknowledge that an emphasis upon a "Judaism of meaning," as opposed to a "Judaism of boundaries and borders," is what is needed in our day.

Reform must establish multiple entry points for all elements of our diverse population in formal and informal settings that are both within and beyond the walls of the synagogue. These settings must include temples and camps, offices and schools, restaurants and shopping centers, the city and the wilderness. Programming should include all types of study that can transform institutions and forge meaning for both the individual and the group, social action programs that contribute to justice in the world, opportunities for the creation of community both formal and casual, and worship and lifecycle celebrations and observances that are evocative and joyous. Our most creative rabbis and professionals are providing for these moments of dialogical encounter already; these efforts must be replicated and increased.

People today, no less than in the past, wish to perceive a sacred vitality at the core of their lives. Living within a pluralistic framework that underscores the importance of individual choice, Jews still can and will seek out Judaism for the wisdom, identity, and community our tradition affords if our religion speaks to them in meaningful cadences. The legacy Isaac Mayer Wise bestowed upon Reform to address broad sectors of the community remains enduring, and the future of Judaism in the U.S. depends, to a large degree, upon the ability of the movement and HUC-JIR to provide leadership that will maintain and revitalize Jewish community, worship, study, association, and action in light of the conditions and values that shape our people today.

## **Sharing Leadership:**A Work in Process and Progress

Jan Katzew

"Virtually everything I have done as a volunteer leader in the Reform movement from the congregation through my current position has been done in partnership with our professionals."

—Robert Heller

"In any successful volunteer-professional partnership in the Reform movement, the participants must believe that the decision-making is a joint process. This requires a great deal of trust, respect, and faith in the partners who are working together." —Marilynn Yentis

These two statements by volunteer leaders in the Reform movement testify to a distinctive, if not defining, aspect of Reform Judaism. With the contraction of halakhic authority and the growth of congregational autonomy, decisions of religious policy and even practice are the shared province of pro-

fessionals and volunteers. To be sure, the balance between authority and autonomy is elusive and the partnership between professionals and volunteers is dynamic. In today's era of professionalization, partnership often means that volunteers are directors that issue directives; they must assert lay ownership and share responsibility. Acknowledging imperfection and asymmetry in the partnership — at times the same vagaries as in any human relationship — is critical to the success of shared leadership. The partnership works more often in theory than in practice — sometimes ending in "divorce" or détente, but other times leading to synergy and symbiosis.

Rather than relying on *poskim* as arbiters of Jewish law (Orthodox) or members of a law committee (Conservative) to determine norms of Jewish practice, Reform Jewish thought and

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practice is shaped by a coalition that includes a seminary (HUC-IIR), an array of professional groups (CCAR, rabbis, ACC, cantors, NATE, ECE-RJ, and PARDeS, educators, and NATA, administrators), and a congregational system (URJ). Not surprisingly, decisions that engage this organizational matrix are time consuming, labor intensive, and process driven. For example, introducing a new siddur (Mishkan T'filah) involved multiple votes by rabbis and feedback from 300-plus congregations that piloted different drafts of the siddur. The result is also telling — a prayerbook in multiple versions, e.g., with and without transliteration, with and without weekday services. Developing a curriculum for congregational schools also required multiple layers of input from academics and practitioners, ongoing assessment, and continual refinement. This process-heavy attitude toward change can at times yield frustration but the prize of inclusiveness and the better outcomes it produces is perceived to be

worth the price of inefficiency.

Helping to create a meaningful Jewish life for every Reform Jew is the shared responsibility of rabbis, cantors, educators, administrators, and lay persons working collaboratively. Collaboration has become more than a method of engagement; it has become a value and, perhaps, a goal. And as partnerships develop, we see volunteers take on roles as teachers, readers of Torah, and worship leaders (shelichei tsibur). In early rabbinic Judaism, zugot (pairs of rabbinic leaders) articulated principles of Jewish thought and practice. They often presented their ideas in tension with one another, e.g., the exegetical approaches of Akiva and Ishmael. An echo of the zugot in Reform Judaism would include a rabbi and a congregational president, a professional and a volunteer, walking and working together, in pursuit of a Torat Chayyim, a living Torah that is authentic and relevant, rooted in Jewish tradition and open to Jewish innovation.

## Sh'ma solicited several "letters" to URJ President Eric Yoffie. He responds on page seven.

## Dear Rabbi Yoffie,

America is a place of nothing.

Nothing is handed down except freedom.

You can die of freedom.\*

Like most Reform rabbis, I've had the experience of seeing children reared in Reform synagogues turn to traditional Judaism when they reach young adulthood. Often it's the most religiously serious and sensitive young people who go in this direction, finding in traditional Judaism a deeply satisfying way of life: order, structure, moral clarity; a sense of authenticity and rootedness; intensive Jewish learning; open, unembarrassed God-talk and God-seeking; dynamic, participatory prayer; the warmth and support of a Shabbat-centered community.

I don't romanticize what traditional communities have to offer, and I know well what these young people are sacrificing in embracing a way of life that may be repressive, cloistered, sexist, and xenophobic. Still, I ask myself if a Reform congregation — grounded in freedom, autonomy, and self-determination — can meet the most powerful needs of the soul. Do we have the capacity to inspire a Judaism of passion and — continued on page 4

## Rabbi Yoffie,

To be honest...the movement is losing us. "Us" is that in-between set. We've moved past high school but not yet settled with a family. We are in college, in grad school, working our way through debts and toward an established career. We are the products of Reform households, camps, NFTY, religious schools; but since we graduated high school, we've been forsaken. If our Hillel didn't offer what we were looking for, our only time to revisit our faith came when we went home for the High Holidays...if that.

It's time to refocus the movement's energy and see why we are losing our children, the "us," the ones who long for a Jewish community of our own — not defined by the youth or by our parents or by a singles scene. We are not always looking for a partner, but rather a firm and stable connection to community and to God. Though I am not choosing a path that will lead me to becoming a Jewish professional, I hope to someday be a lay leader for my movement. However, when the movement makes so little effort to beckon me back, it is difficult to imagine serving the URJ in my future.

Programs that work revolutionize the — continued on page 4

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